

## What Are SSRIs?

- **SSRI = Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor**
- A type of antidepressant that alters levels of chemicals (e.g. serotonin) in the brain – can be used to treat depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions.
- Examples include – sertraline, citalopram, escitalopram and fluoxetine.

## Starting SSRIs:

- Most commonly given as a once daily tablet
- It can take **2-4 weeks to see improvement** – if no effect within 4-6 weeks, discuss with your doctor
- When first starting SSRIs there are some common side effects which include: stomach upset (feeling sick, diarrhoea), dizziness, loss of sex drive
- In the first few weeks, you may experience anxiety and rarely SSRIs can cause mood to worsen or trigger thoughts of harming yourself – if this happens you should speak to your doctor urgently

**If you have thoughts of harming yourself or others you should seek urgent medical attention**

## Medication Reviews:

- You should be reviewed within a few weeks of starting treatment or changing dose – at this point the benefits can be reviewed and side effects can be screened for
- Further reviews will depend on response to treatment and if dose changes are needed
- It is important to try not to miss any doses of your medication as it can make treatment less effective

**50-70% of people with moderate to severe depression see an improvement within a few weeks of starting treatment**



## Stopping SSRIs:

- Although they are not addictive, if SSRIs are stopped suddenly, they can cause withdrawal symptoms (flu-like symptoms, anxiety and dizziness)
- If you would like to stop your SSRI, you should discuss with your doctor to come up with a plan to come off the medication **gradually**

## Interactions:

- Certain medications can interact with SSRIs including blood thinners and antipsychotics – please check with your doctor if you have any concerns about this
- You should avoid the herbal remedy St John's Wort as this can interact with SSRIs
- Consuming alcohol whilst on SSRIs can increase drowsiness and worsen symptoms of low mood

## Treatment Duration:

- Generally, it is advised that the medication is continued for **6 months** following symptoms improving – this is to prevent symptoms coming back after stopping the medication
- If you have recurrent depression, we may recommend that you continue the medication for **2 years** after symptoms have improved

**This leaflet aims to cover key points of SSRI treatment; please refer to the medication leaflet with your prescription for a comprehensive guide and contact your doctor with any questions. Further information can be found at:**

[www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/medicines-and-psychiatry/ssri-antidepressants/](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/medicines-and-psychiatry/ssri-antidepressants/)